

Remarks by Chargé d’Affaires, Margaret Diop, at the Caribbean Returning Nationals Forum, Central Bank, Port of Spain. Friday August 23, 2013.

Good evening, everyone, and thank you for your warm welcome.

I am very pleased to be here for the launch of the First Annual Business Networking Forum for Caribbean Returning Nationals.

The attendees here tonight are a testament to the enduring bonds between the United States and Trinidad and Tobago.

The strong ties between our two countries have been on full display this year, especially during the visit of United States Vice President Joe Biden and his wife, Dr. Jill Biden to Port of Spain.

The Vice President’s visit highlighted the value we place on our relationship with the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago. It also signaled that Trinidad and Tobago is a leader in the region, and a nation that shares our most important values.

The United States and Trinidad and Tobago enjoy long-standing commercial, cultural, and family connections that extend into many

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sectors of the economy, all of which are valuable to our respective nations.

We are your largest trading partner, taking in roughly 44 percent of your exports and providing approximately 33 percent of your imports. Foreign Direct Investment amounted to a total of \$574 million U.S. dollars in 2011.

Through the Caribbean Basin Initiative, we facilitate the economic development and export diversification of Caribbean Basin economies by providing duty-free access to the U.S. market for most goods. Trinidad and Tobago has been one of the primary beneficiaries of this Initiative.

In May of this year, we signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement with CARICOM to promote trade and investment.

We aim to promote the long-term development, expansion, and diversification of trade in products and services, as well as to promote an attractive investment climate.

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Through the Council on Trade and Investment, we work with CARICOM members on issues, such as intellectual property rights, worker rights, and the environment -- to the benefit of the region.

We also continue to work together on regional security through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI). Through this initiative, the U.S. funds programs that promote citizen security, empower youth, and promote social justice.

We are doing everything from training law enforcement officers in the latest investigative techniques, to addressing the causes of crime through computer literacy classes and youth programs.

We trust that the Caribbean Returning Nationals Foundation shares our goal of improving security throughout the region, thereby creating new avenues for economic growth and prosperity.

Our ties, however, are more than just policy and programming. Our ties are personal. As you well know, many Trinbagonians have

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family and friends in the United States and look forward to traveling to the U.S. every year to visit with them.

Over the past year, the U.S. Embassy issued approximately 30,000 visas for Trinbagonian travelers to the United States, as well as several thousand travel documents for legal permanent residents and American citizens -- a testament to the numerous personal ties that bind the people of our two countries.

At our Embassy here in Port of Spain, we are now in the final stages of completing a major renovation of our consular facilities. These enhancements will enable us to provide a reception area that matches the excellent service we seek to provide to U.S. citizens, Legal Permanent Residents, and Trinbagonians.

In closing, I want to sincerely thank the organizers of this important event and the members of the Caribbean Diaspora here tonight for your interest in re-investing in and contributing to this beautiful and vital region, and for working with us to further strengthen the ties between our two countries. Thank you.